

THE
Grounds of Unity
IN
RELIGION:
OR AN
EXPEDIENT
For a general CONFORMITY
AND
PACIFICATION:



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METHOD OF UNITING

PROTESTANT

METHODS

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RELIGION, &c.

Unity and submission is desired of all Princes and Commonwealths, as that which preserves Peace and Happiness in all Societies, for a Nation full of discontents and Factions, is next door to Rebellion; and consequently Ruine.

One great foundation of Peace is the due submission of all parties as well Ecclesiastical as Civil, to the temporal Prince, as supreme Governour in all causes and subject to none but God.

And this may be yielded, and yet not a compleat satisfaction in the general; for by a tolleration in Religion, different Sects may possibly submit for politick ends, though this unites not, but only palliates, which yet is better than a worse evil.

But that which breeds the perfect concord and compleat union is this, when the Ecclesiasticks, and again the people agree to, and embrace the publick establish'd Church-Discipline, without murmuring, nor out of force, but love and good opinion of it.

To which end and purpose, it ought to be as rational and consonant to the Law of nature as possible; agreeing with the plain apprehensions of humanity and down-right sincerity of the commons, without specious circumstances or imperinencies, which the people think are but amuzements and sophistications in the worship of God; but yet also compliant with the ends of prudence, and order without affectation of Novelty on th'one hand, or superstition on th'other, and this will infallibly be of force, for being founded in reason, it will be applicable and comprehensive to all reasonable men.

For this is most certain, the Church was pure and plain at the beginning, without ceremonies and circumstances; and Christians met together humbly, decently, and Religiously, with hearty Prayers to God, and hearing of the word fervently Preached with

such apprehensiveness and reason, that they made the people willingly to relinque their blind and superstitious opinions, to such real and demonstrated truths, pressing them to search the Scriptures, and their own Consciences, whether those things they taught were so or no; in this purity and sincerity; were the Primitive times, with which their innocency and holiness of life so prevail'd, that many Kings and Kingdoms in short time embraced the Christian Religion, and strongly upheld it. But since it grew to so much splendour and pomp, that Superstition, Vanity and arrogance crept also by degrees into the Clergy, that soon dimm'd the Lustre, and abated the true glory of Religion, and was the cause of many divisions.

For this is a Rule in the Discipline of the Church and Worship of God, that too much formality spoils devotion, and makes men cold in the searches after truth; the more plain and free from ceremonies and circumstantialities it is, provided it be decent, the more pure and substantial it will prove, and the more ground for a general union; wherefore in all such cases, much care should be taken that the great stumbling blocks of discord be taken away, for though they are of themselves indifferent, yet when they bring much and considerable disturbance, they then cease to be indifferent as to peace and quietness, and so are better regulated or removed.

Now doubtless though Episcopacy is the purer, as well as the most ancient Discipline of the Church, having obtained in all Christian Churches of the world of what sort or sect soever, yet 1500 years together after Christ, and the Church of England at present is lookt upon to be the best regulated of all Episcopacy, and yet if there can be any more advantages given to it for the farther Improvement of Unity from ancient prescription, right reason or modern example; doubtless it might be good to be put in Practice, for we should still attend to improvement and perfection, for the more comprehensive and generally acceptable it is, the more firm and establish'd it will be.

For there is nothing conducent more to Unity and Peace than by taking off and reducing the general Factions of Religion, which is done by enlarging it be become of the Church, and taking

off things that are cavild at, provided only they are Circumstantial, as commonly they are, and nor the materials and Essentials of Religion; so would both the cawls cease, and Sectaries also and of course fall of themselves to the ground without more ado, and incorporate to the same Church with us unavoydably.

For the true way of Unity, is such a composed mean of Church-Discipline, as may render the major part and generality of rational people satisfied, which may easily be done with us without altering the frame of government, or taring things to pieces, but only by joyning the two great Parties of this Nation together, (*viz.*) the *Episcopal* and *Presbyterian*, which parties are at least nine parts in ten of the Nation, including all other Sects, which may be done by a little regulation, abating only some things and reforming others.

For Episcopacy and the same Discipline in general is well enough approved by the most, but as in all times of civil Government, Emendations and making Laws hath been for the better convenience of the publick according to the emergencies of things, and conjunction of times and occasions, so also is it convenient in the Ecclesiastical Regiment, for some things will be alwayes proper at some times, and some ages, that is not proper in the other; and so accordingly they must be remedied, for in an age or some long tract of time, mens manners and the constitutions of things alter extremely, and so must have corrections proportionably.

And all people being now satisfied that the Church of *England* by Episcopacy is to be the standing Government, being established by Parliament, and alwayes owned so by his Majesty; if there be once a further comprehension of the Presbyterians in and according to that Government; all other parties will soon be quiet as too small to stand in computation on the one hand, and on the other hand the Church being thus regulated will bring in the rest dayly also, so that some small regulation and abatement of the very same Church-Discipline we have already, will work the desired effect. And as for the other Dissenters they may have some connivance, but no legal Liberty; for legal allowance will mak them impudent, and endeavour to encrease, whereas otherwise they will be humble and cautious.

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Wherefore unite those two parties, and the Church is establish'd, and much better, and stronger, than ever; this will not only oblige our Friends at home, but all the Protestants beyond Seas; and this may be done by the rule abovesaid without altering the mode of Government, for we differ but in a few things in Discipline and none in Doctrine, they have left of themselves the notion of Elders, and, if it were in their own choice, would direct moderate Episcopacy, and would concede yet very much more for the gaining of our friendship, and being one with us, which will be a very happy period of that long and great contest now never to be heard of any more.

To effect this, a few things will be sufficient; as dispensing with the Surplice, and part of an Oath in the Act of Uniformity, also the Crossing in Baptism, and kneeling at the Sacrament left indifferent, and pluralities taken away; these things being abated, they would agree with all things else very well, and be as much or more for Episcopacy than we ourselves; and why should not we desire this also that will unite us so invincably, wherefore should we stick at such little circumstances to hinder so great a work; and as for taking away pluralities, there are but few sober men of either party but heartily desire it, it being that which makes ill those which have too many, and hinders abundance of Learned men from preferment; it being prudence in Government, rather to provide convenient and comfortable preferments for many, than great preferments for few; and things thus remedied and qualified will be so far from weakning the Protestant Interest, that it will raise it higher than ever, and make Episcopacy stand upon a firm and everlasting Basis. I am confident these few things, last mentioned, will do the work; however if there were any other hindrances of the like nature, what matter were it to remove them for the Churches security, the advantage will soon be perceived, this will drown and take away the name of Presbytery as well as all nicknames of parties, and make them have no abettors nor understand how to begin a quarrel if they would themselves.

Some may say it will be ill making alterations, but that is of some Extraordinary thing which discontents the major part of the Nation; but this is the contrary, for here the major part will not only be well pleased at it, but will also be advantaged: where then is the inconveniency of it? the Royal and Protestant party, if

Ceremonies were abated, would not be disoblig'd, or the less Subjects for it, they referring all such Matters to the King & Parliament, and would be as well pleas'd in his Majesties farther Directions in this, as they were with Queen *Elizabeths* before; for it is all one to them if the Government be satisfied, they acquiesce as well in taking of them away, as setting of them up, and more, because they see, it's for making many Friends. Again, the *Presbyterians* that were displeas'd before, are by this reconcil'd, which will on all the scores of Humanity and Christianity, oblige them to be grateful to Eternity; and for the Church of England, it will very much enlarge the bosome of it, Exalting it above all Disputes about Disciplines, making it so firm, that nothing can shake it.

And others may object, that if these things be granted, the Sectaries will desire more and more still, till they have pul'd down all Decencie, good Order, and Ecclesiastical Government, but this doth not follow, for by the same Rule, there can't be a motion to reform any thing amiss whatsoever, but they shall straight prevent it by a pretence of a destructive change, but this alters no groundwork or substantial in Discipline, only pruning off some superfluities, for according to the common Maxime, take away the Cause, and the Effect ceaseth; for Example, if a man putteth on Laces on his Linnen, or Garment, some will say they are too broad, others too narrow, others not fine enough, otherwise again no good pattern, when he that wears none gives no opportunity to be talk'd of, or for any body to be displeas'd with him. So its generally in all other things, the more plain and substantial it is, the better its lik'd, and so in Discipline, if they should quarrel at Foundations and substantial things, they would render their party weak and themselves ridiculous, wherefore for their own Credit and Christianity, they would not unrip those Sacred Tyes and Ligaments, but many Ceremonies and circumstantial, common reason tells us, is liable to the censure of every common pretender under the notion of superstition, whilst plainness and seriousness in Religion, fills up all peoples hearts to applaude it, its no policy to uphold things to be agued and disput'd at or cause differences, when taking of them away cureth the troubles without any more to do, cutting off the discontented Caviel.

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For the true Ballance of the Church Government, is to have as few unnecessary obligations as possible, and to be free from all Cloggs in oppression of reason or conscience; but giving latitude be comprehensive of the generality as much as may be, for all Articles ought to be contrived for enlarging the bosome of the Church to the utmost Extent; and in cases of this nature private Animosities ought by every one to be laid aside for the publick Concern.

To be brief, all manner of inconvenient Church-rigour being thus calmed; how strong should we be in our selves, it would keep many strickt sort of people from going beyond Sea, blast all the designs of the Enemies of the Church, and oblige all sorts of Foreign, and home Protestants, making them flock to it, and cherish so moderate a Government, & would not scruple at Bishops, or any good Order, but would gladly joyn with them, as being questionable the best Government in the world; if truly regulated, and when once the great Ones and heads of Parties are obliged by state Prudence, the rest will soon crumble to nothing; by this all Sectaries will diminish, when once the apparent grounds of difference is taken away, for this would not only unite us for the present, but keep people from growing to be Schismatics for the future; as well as increase the body of the Church; when they see is not Ceremonies are stood on, as some incendiaries pretend, but instead thereof, so much willingness and plain-heartedness, to unite all people in the Worship of God. Thus shall the Church of England be more firmly establishd than ever, the people pleased and conformable, His Majesty feared of his Enemies abroad, and become strong in the affections of his Subjects at home: Trade also would soon revive and flourish, and not only the Dutch, but other Protestants also flock over with banks of Money, and Manufactories, His Majesty by it gaining the hearts of all the Protestants of Europe, as well as their Trades and Merchandize, by endeavouring to establish, thus the purity of the Worship of God, easing of tender Consciences, and securing them more free in their persons, Religion, and Property, than any place in the world besides, which is that which increaseth the Trade and grandure of any Nation,